FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, has assessed the environmental effects of the following action:

Anchorage Harbor Dredging and Disposal
Anchorage, Alaska

The Corps of Engineers August 2008 environmental assessment defined the proposed action and addressed the environmental effects of that action. The proposed action will increase the dredging volume in Anchorage Harbor, will alter the dredging footprint, and will expand the existing dredged material disposal site. The Corps of Engineers has dredged Anchorage Harbor annually since authorization in 1958 to maintain adequate depths for shipping. Dredging typically begins in May and ends in late summer or early autumn. Annual maintenance dredging volumes vary substantially and have approached 2 million cubic yards. Anchorage Harbor (the Port of Anchorage) is on Knik Arm near its junction with Turnagain Arm at the head of Cook Inlet in Southcentral Alaska. The proposed action will continue annual maintenance dredging to maintain authorized depths, will conduct additional dredging to support expansion by the Port of Anchorage and the Maritime Administration, and will maintain authorized depths for the expanded harbor. Port expansion was addressed by an earlier Maritime Administration environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact. The Corps of Engineers proposed action supports and is consistent with the earlier port expansion environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact.

Dredging will remove material from about 250 acres of the Knik Arm bottom each year during and after port expansion. Annual dredged material volumes are expected to reach a maximum of about 5.6 million cubic yards during port expansion and then to decline after construction to an estimated annual maximum of about 2.5 million cubic yards. Dredged material is discharged into a hydrologically dynamic site near the harbor where it is rapidly dispersed. The proposed action will continue this practice. The disposal site will be expanded to a total area of about 400 acres to accommodate greater volumes during port expansion and to provide greater flexibility for maintenance dredging after expansion is complete.

Principal resources of concern identified in the environmental assessment process were salmon, beluga whales, the species they prey on, and their habitat. These resources were evaluated in the Corps of Engineers August 2008 environmental assessment. Those assessments led to the following conclusions:

- Adult salmon are not substantially affected. They tend to migrate closer to shore. Noise and activity comparable to that of dredging does not prevent them from reaching spawning habitat in Knik Arm or elsewhere.
- Juvenile salmon may be present in Knik Arm for more than a month during the dredging period and feed successfully at the surface during their residence. All

dredged material and overflow water from dredging will be discharged beneath the surface to avoid impacts on juvenile salmon feeding. Turbidity at the surface will be tested during dredging to determine whether additional adaptive measures should be incorporated to protect this resource.

- Sounds generated by dredging and related activities are similar in intensity to those associated with other harbor activities and most are close to ambient noise levels. Beluga whales tolerant of port activities and noise also would be tolerant of dredging activities and noise. To protect beluga whales, all dredging and disposal activities will be suspended any time beluga whales are within 200 meters of the activity.
- Activities at and near Port of Anchorage, including dredging, do not prevent beluga whales from feeding actively near the port. During the winter, beluga whales may feed on fish and invertebrates on and near the bottom that are not available in Knik Arm at other times. Dredging and dredged material disposal will affect a maximum of about 650 acres of Knik Arm bottom habitat that may be used by prey organisms. Alteration of habitat is unlikely to substantially affect beluga whale feeding because: 1) potential prey organisms are mobile and able to repopulate affected areas; 2) the affected area is a small part of available habitat in the Cook Inlet beluga whale winter range; and, 3) because winter habitat in Cook Inlet belugas' range supported a much larger population just a few years ago.

The Cook Inlet population segment of beluga whales was listed as endangered by the National Marine Fisheries Service in October 2008. The Corps of Engineers coordinated with the National Marine Fisheries Service in anticipation of this listing as the environmental assessment was being prepared. Further coordination is required to meet the procedural requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The proposed action will proceed only after all Endangered Species Act consultation requirements have been completed. All other state and federal coordination has been completed. There are no other outstanding issues.

The action is consistent with the state coastal management program to the maximum extent practicable. The accompanying environmental assessment supports the conclusion that the project does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for Anchorage Harbor dredging and disposal actions evaluated in the Corps of Engineers August 2008 environmental assessment.

Kevin Wilson
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

10/28/08
Date